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ABSTRACT

A sequence of stages in children's emotional response to parental separation and divorce is described, some effects of continued parent hostility are pointed out, and aspects of children's adjustment to changed family circumstances are briefly discussed. Developmental differences in children's responses to divorce are considered on the basis of research findings. Specific attention is given to the responses of infants, preschool children, school-age children, and adolescents. Children's perceptions of their parents' divorces are examined with reference to custody and the sex of the custodial parent; long term effects of divorce are discussed in terms of adjustment, sex of children, parenting, and problem solving. An educational program designed to assist divorcing parents and their children to express feelings about divorce and to provide some guidelines for counselors and teachers dealing with children of divorce is also described. (RH)

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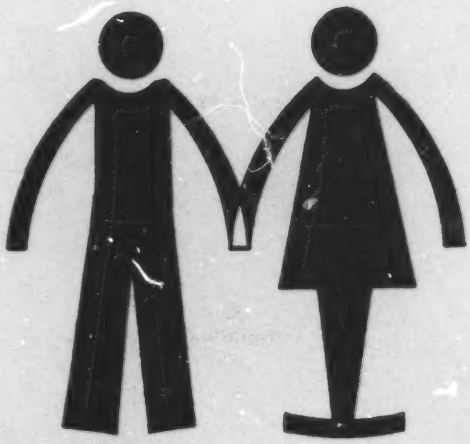

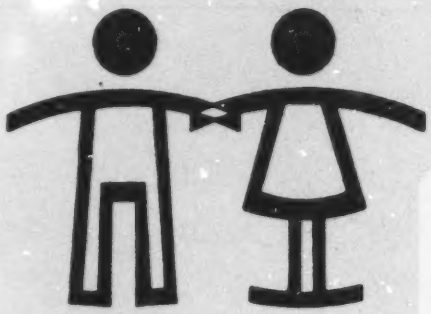

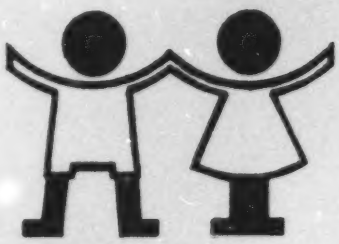

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THE CHILD IN THE DIVORCING FAMILY

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THE CHILD IN THE DIVORCING FAMILY

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INTRODUCTION

Social Attitudes Toward Children

Parental conflicts and behaviours during divorce which are most likely to be disturbing for children are often those which reflect society's fundamentally capitalistic, uninformed and hostile attitude toward children. For example, custody battles may arise because children are regarded as the rightful property of their parents rather than primarily as persons needing optimal physical, personal and social nourishment. The latter is often forgotten in the understandable emotionality that divorce may generate. For similar reasons, particularly where the "property" view extends into the psychological realm, children may be regarded as extensions of their parent's needs and wishes, such that anger about the opposing spouse or personal distress is heaped on them or they may be used to carry hurtful, aggressive, even vicious messages between waring parents. Many are used as a means for the parents to "get at" each other.

These insensitivites about children happen even in the most caring families and reflect, not only the "property" view of children and a concomitant failure to "individuate" them, but a lack of community education about child development. Above all, these insensitivities are seen as being of little consequence in a society that sanctions psychological and physical violence toward children. Later, I shall discuss what supports are needed to help the divorcing parent through a most distressful time so that these kinds of problems are at least reduced for children.

Even where children are not involved in conflict between divorcing parents, the impact of the separation on the child is often not fully recognized because of the widely accepted folklore in our society that children are not quite as human as adults and hence, not very deep in their feelings. The common generalisation that children "get over" severe emotional disruptions with greater ease than adults, is an outcome of this illfounded piece of folklore and is usually and illogically accompanied by the idea that cognitively, children understand and perceive things in the same way as adults. The conflict between these two beliefs and the double bind in which they put the child, is little recognised.

In this paper, I shall attempt to dispel some common misunderstanding about children's feelings during parental divorce by looking at the research evidence. Then, I shall discuss how differently children perceive and adjust to their parents' divorce, according to their own stage of cognitive and emotional development; later, some matters pertaining to custody and long term effects of parental divorce will be examined.

RESPONSES TO SEPARATION

First, how do children react to parental divorce? Research by Hozman and Froiland (1977) over a long period with large numbers of children suggest

that their emotional response and suffering is, in many respects, similar to that of the divorcing adults, although the expressive behaviours may be different. They observed that children and adults alike, went through the same stages of distress as one does in response to the other major separation, namely the death of someone close to them. For the purposes of this paper, I shall over-simplify the sequence of these stages. Usually, the child (or the adult), is not exclusively in any one stage at any particular time. Rather, there is a mixture of stages with the behaviours of one stage predominating.

Denial

Initially, upon discovering that the parents are planning to separate, a child may not want to believe that the twosome parent situation, with which he/she is most familiar and, perhaps, most secure, will eventually disappear. Children may deny what is about to happen, attempt to block it out, appear not to hear or become very withdrawn. This can be falsely interpreted as indifference or as the child being too young to understand or care. An illustrative case is Maria:

> Maria was six when her previously adoring father left the family home to live with another woman, returning at weekends to be with his children. There was an older boy and girl. Of all the children, Maria took the news with seeming calmness and was remarkably indifferent to her father at weekends. This was taken by both parents as a good adjustment. The mother, who was exceedingly distressed by the behaviour of the father and tended to see Maria's behaviour as supporting her own feelings, argued that Maria behaved that way because she did not love her heartless father anymore. It was at school that Maria's hidden distress became apparent. The teacher complained that the previously co-operative Maria was now "telling monstrous lies" - for example, that her father flew to China during the week to make a lot of money for the family and that Maria was fighting with other children who did not believe these fantastic stories. Although the teacher was remarkably ignorant about child development and had punished Maria frequently, her complaints brought the parents to discuss the problem with a sympathetic headmistress. It became apparent that Maria was trying to deny that a divorce would soon take place between her parents. What she had needed was more careful explanation of events and a caring atmosphere in which she could express and come to terms with her anger and grief.

Anger

Once children have faced up to the fact that the divorce is inevitable, they may become very angry and behave aggressively toward the offending parents, which often compounds the parents' own feelings of rejection in the divorcing situation. Children may become very difficult, negative and regress into temper tantrums, not only at home, but with any persons whom they see as being similar to parents, such as teachers. Unfortunately, teachers are not always aware, or able to understand the bases, of these anti-social behaviours as in the following case:

Paul was eight when his parents commenced divorce proceedings. His school record had previously indicated a very bright and interested pupil but suddenly it became poor and Paul seemed unmotivated and exceedingly quarrelsome with other boys. He was frequently in fights. The headmaster resorted to the cane. During one punishment session Paul shouted "You are just like my father, I hate you" and tried to hit the headmaster. The counsellor for the area was called in and discovered the home situation. The counsellor encouraged Paul to freely express his feelings and it soon became clear that Paul was very angry with his parents and needed someone to whom he could safely express that anger. His outbursts toward both parents had been frequent and exceedingly distressing for them in their own disturbing situation. The counsellor discovered the boy had a favourite uncle who was able to step in temporarily, listen sympathetically and help Paul through a very bad time until he saw the futility of his anger and that it was leaving him without friends at school.

Bargaining

When denial and anger are not productive in stopping their parents' divorce, children may try to cope by bargaining. They may promise to be good, or successful in school, or try to show more affection and love. These behaviours are often motivated by a child's sense of guilt and misguided belief that he/she is responsible for a parent wanting to leave. This belief springs, in part, from the fact that cognitively, children are not able to abstractly judge the complexity of the motives of others. It also originates in the pressure that is put upon children to be "good" for the purpose of pleasing their parents and to see their misbehaviour as causing upset and unhappiness to grow ups. Children's sense of self or individuation from others, is generally not fully developed until the late teens and they tend to incorporate their parents' attitudes towards them into their view of themselves; lacking abstract thought, they are not yet able to impartially assess those who control them.

At pre-school and school age, some of this bargaining to be good in children of divorcing parents, is pathetic to observe. They may be strained and anxious in their attempts to be unrealistically helpful with household tasks and pleasing and comforting to their parents. Some regress to a more babyish stage of development and reason that being younger and more childish is the way to induce the departed parent to return home, for were their parents not permanently available when they were little?

Others may try to manipulate the situation, nevertheless retaining a sense of guilt because they exaggerate the extent of their influence, due again to limited and heteronomous (under adult control) views of self.

Diana, now twenty, comments on her behaviour at fifteen during her parents' divorce:

> I made a lot of mileage out of it. I went to a private boarding school where the divorce rate was high because parents could afford it. It was the "in thing" to have divorcing parents and the school teachers were very sympathetic as were my grandparents and uncles and aunts. So I exaggerated everything and wept widely and threw tantrums and was sulky and my grandparents would buy me

presents and take me on holidays and cuddle me a lot. I daresy that was good for me and made it a lot easier. My parents also gave me a lot of things. I could get things out of them by telling them what the other one had given as they were not on speaking terms. I could also insult them and they'd take it. Then at one stage I thought they were going to get together again and I set about manipulating them and telling them nasty things they had said about each other. Frankly, the divorce suited me and I still like it that way. I get on better with each of them separately, but sometimes I feel I was pretty nasty to have done what I did. I think I was jealous of my parents' affection for each other in my early childhood. My father adored my mother and was really cut up when she left.

Depression

When children have tried denial, anger and bargaining, and yet the divorce plan is not changed, they may become very depressed because they cannot influence a situation that so directly affects them. The depression is often strongly tinged with guilt about past uncooperative behaviours and lost opportunities to express love and to please the departed parent. Sometimes they panic, not sure of the future or that the remaining parent may not depart also. They become excessively overconscientious and excessively clinging to parental substitutes. John, who teaches in a primary school where at least one third of the children come from divorced families, describes his difficulties with such children:

> It can be very difficult and embarrassing to handle because small boys in particular, sometimes see me as a father substitute when their parents divorce and they are left with the mother. They wait for me at the school gate, follow me around the playground and some of them even call me Dad. One of the youngest boys cried bitterly one day when I didn't come to school because I was ill. He thought I'd left the school for good.

Coming to Terms

Finally, after some time, and this can vary from twelve months to four years or longer, children generally come to terms with the divorce, although they may not like it. The best adjustments seem to be in families where children have been given time to mourn, know that their future is secure with at least one parent, and that both parents will continue to love and maintain an interest in them. They come to understand that they cannot blame themselves for the unpleasant situation, nor could they influence it. Children need sympathetic support and understanding (as do adults) as each stage of their response to separation occurs. As parents are so often distressed and confused in this period, a supportive relative or friend who is not directly involved in the conflict, may be of benefit to the children.

SOME EFFECTS OF CONTINUED PARENT HOSTILITY

One confusing and depressing problem for children in divorcing families is that previously beloved and admired parents may seriously criticise one another and have an emotional investment in the child's acceptance of these criticisms.

These criticisisms may not only be damaging to the parent, but also to the child's identity development. The following is an extreme case, but it can happen in the best of families without a history of mental illness.

> Anne's parents separated when she was ten. She had two sisters. The family had previously been a very close and loving one and the divorce was a product of a sudden onset of a hereditary mental disturbance in the father. The father, in his deteriorating mental state, desperately tried to demonstrate to the children that it was the mother who was mentally disturbed, not he. "I found it very confusing", reported Anne, "because he was quite cunning at planning things to make it look as though mum was suffering delusions and he never stopped telling us she was hysterical and neurotic. My other sisters were old enough to see both sides. I was too young to grasp it and believed all he said. Mum rarely said anything about his mental disturbance although she often said he upset her and cried a lot when he tried out something pretty malicious. Until recently I really believed mum was neurotic and that I was going to be like her, but now I'm older I see she's a capable, intelligent and emotionally enduring person. She put up with more than most wives should and sympathised with dad to the neglect of herself. Problem is, I might behave similarly in marriage."

To many parents, the divorce is a prototype of the earliest childhood fears of loss of attachment (Bowlby, 1980). Feelings of rejection and loss of self esteem can make previously rational and caring parents appear irrationally emotional. In their suffering and distress they may regress in their ability to recognise their children's needs. Frightened pre-schoolers may be left on the non-custodial parent's access day to wait on the street to be collected, rather than one parent endure the sight of the other. On other occasions, access days may result in wild emotional outbursts between parents, and even violence, which may terrorise children unable, as yet, to grasp the psychological aspects of human relationships and conflicts.

ADJUSTMENTS TO CHANGED CIRCUMSTANCES

During and after divorce the child may have to adjust to having only one parental figure as a model, whereas before, there were two. This may offer the child a more restricted array of positive characteristics to observe. Two parents are likely to exhibit a wider range of interests, skills and attributes. Also, in two parent families, a loving, competent or well-adjusted parent can help counteract a rejecting, incompetent or unsuitable parent, or a gentler parent may act as a buffer for a severe and disciplinarian one.

The child of divorced parents, where the mother has custody, may also undergo special problems of authority and discipline in a society where the image of greater authority and power is vested in males. The child may previously have experienced the father as the disciplinarian and, in the post divorce period, may be especially deviant. Many mothers cope by ultimately learning to be more assertive. In the short run, however, children in divorced families may present more behaviour disturbances (Hetherington, Cox & Cox, 1978).

One major adjustment for children who remain with the divorced mother (which is most often the case) is that there may be a serious change in the family's economic position. Some "single mother" families are now living below the poverty line. Also, divorced mothers are often isolated and lacking in social and

emotional support and this, in turn, affects the child. It might be thought that the presence of children would relieve this sense of loneliness. However, recent studies by Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1978), suggest that the presence of children may actually make mothers feel more unhappy, frustrated, helpless, anxious and incompetent, especially where they have defiant and aggressive young sons. The research suggests that similarly, where fathers are divorced and have custody, they, too, may suffer a sense of social and emotional isolation (Dreyfus, 1979).

DEVELOPMENTAL STAGES

It is also evident that children at different developmental ages respond differently to their parents' divorce and perceive it differently. Thus, to help children through a difficult time successfully, one needs to understand that children perceive and think differently from adults, and from each other, at different stages. For the purposes of this paper, research in respect of four stages of childhood will be considered although, for many children, the behaviours of each stage may overlap.

Infants

A recent study by Lawrence Kurdek (in press), points to the fact that infants are affected largely through the emotional state of the caregiver. An infant develops a sense of well-being and comfortable self-awareness at the bodily level by being held and cuddled by the caregiver (Phillips, 1980, 1981). If the caregiver is depressed and hostile, the infant may not develop a good bodily sense of self and comfortable well-being. In extreme cases, the infant may fail to develop a secure attachment (Bowlby, 1980). The following case illustrates some of these points:

> Sarah was an outstandingly pretty and physically well-developed infant of twelve months. She had very affectionate parents and was responsive and alert. The father began having an affair with an older woman who was a successful and intelligent colleague and became so involved he asked for a divorce. Conflict between the parents became intense and the mother was particularly resentful that she had given up her own successful career to stay at home and care for Sarah. Not only did the infant hear and see almost continual fights, but both parents became less affectionate toward her. She began to cry continually, sleep and eat badly, and lose her alertness. Unfortunately, both parents were unaware that an infant without speech could pick up distress signals in other ways and certainly such parents need more information and support during conflict to enable them to continue to meet the needs of their offspring.

Pre-Schoolers

Pre-schoolers are often viewed as the most vulnerable group of children because their level of cognitive development, or how they think, is not yet abstract enough to understand the interplay of personal relationships. They cannot understand

divorce in psychological or emotional terms but rather perceive the divorce in terms of their own physically-oriented logic which, while revealing much hard thinking, is largely associative and not deductive. Also, pre-schoolers are apt to believe that everyone sees things as they do. For example, very young children may claim that you can't see them when they close their eyes, or that others should know exactly what they need without their telling. Lacking the multiple perspectives of abstract thought they see themselves and their actions as central and hence, they may feel guilt and think their naughtiness, or lack of demonstrated affection, is responsible for the departure of the non-custodial parent. Due to this view of self, and distress at the loss of the non-custodial parent, they may experience nightmares, depression, eating problems, or bedwetting. Their play may become less imaginative (Kurdek & Siesky, 1980), less cooperative and constructive, and there may be less of it. They may also become dependent, naughty and whingy - factors which are generally an indication of upset and distress in a child. On the positive side, younger children, because of their appeal and dependence, may experience more consistently affectionate parenting in the post divorce period than any other age group.

School Age Children

School age children have come to invest a lot in both parents and perhaps, for some, the father may be more involved in their activities than at an earlier period. Thus, the school age child may suffer his departure or that of either parent as a profound loss. Common reactions during and after separation include depression, withdrawal, marked deterioration in school performance and persistent requests for an explanation as to why the parental separation had to occur (Kurdek & Siesky, 1980). The school age child is a concrete and pragmatic thinker. His/her thinking processes, although less egocentric than that of the pre-schooler, are still not yet abstract in nature; love for the parents is expressed in concrete terms of helping, being good and playing together. Furthermore, abstract concepts involved in assessing reciprocal human relationships are nonsensical to a concrete thinking child who may ask: "Why can't you get on better?", "Why can't you try!", "I can try to be good!", or "Daddy asks me to be good so why can't they be good to each other?".

To add to the problem, there is a general tendency in our community to regard the child in the divorcing or divorced family negatively and the child may experience some rejection from teachers and peers. In this situation, moving to another school with a fresh start can often help a child enormously, as can meeting with other children with divorced parents. Boys often tend to take much longer to adjust than girls in this period (Kurdek, Blisk & Siesky, in press). It is thought this has something to do with the socialisation process whereby boys are taught less about human relationships.

On the other hand, where children have been brought up to be independent, had rules explained to them, had behaviour explained in terms of its effects on others, and had lots of prior love and explanation about human relationships, the research suggests that such children in this age group and in adolescence, while still undergoing thestages of mourning indicated in the beginning of this paper, ultimately come to reasonable terms with a divorce, although they do not like its effects on them (Kurdek & Siesky, 1980).

Adolescents

Unless parental conflict has been extended over a long period, adolescents are probably better equipped to understand what is involved psychologically in divorce than younger age groups. This is so because adolescents, particularly those of fifteen or sixteen or more, often have developed the cognitive maturity and the abstract thought processes necessary to comprehend the reciprocity of human relationships. They can also turn to their peers and others more readily for comfort and advice. Younger primary school children on the other hand, often do not tell their peers of their parents' divorce because they feel that, not to have two parents, indicates a deficiency in themselves and are ashamed. Many find the experience of divorcing parents too painful to express. The younger child's self concept is not yet sufficiently consistent and reinforced to analyse severe distress and thus, denial is frequently a safety valve. Adolescents, because their sense of identity is stronger, are more able to discuss and bring such feelings to the surface.

Some major problems for both primary school children and adolescents is that they are sometimes anxious about what is to happen to them and whether anyone will provide for them, since both age groups are still dependent on parents for affection and physical provision. Parents themselves, knowing the outcome for their children, often egocentrically take it for granted that their children know also and forget to explain that someone will provide care and support. This anxiety can also apply to much younger children as can fear of the departure of the remaining parent.

As indicated earlier, children's anxieties are exacerbated by their direct involvement in the conflict through being used as messengers or as a means of one parent getting at the other. Some divorcing parents,in their distress, further compound the problem by reversing roles with a child so that he/she is treated as an adult to lean on or to replace the missing partner. The latter is fraught with anxiety for the child because, as a replacement, he/she may be regarded with the same ambivalence as the spouse he/she represents. The following case is illustrative:

> There were three children in the S family - Melanie, Ingar and David. The eldest, Melanie, resembled the mother. When the children took jobs and began living in digs, the mother left the family home, much to everyone's surprise. She had previously played a socially submissive role to her husband, although taking most of the responsibilities for the management of family and home. She had applied for a job in which she was interested and after leaving home became much more socially outgoing and extremely successful in her work. Family friends began to revise their opinion of Mr and Mrs S and Mrs S became much more socially central to them. Mr S's self esteem suffered markedly. Melanie had previously been his favourite child but he now developed an intensely ambivalent attitude toward his very intelligent and charming daughter. He began to describe her as "difficult", "neurotic", "incapable of constancy", having "no friends" and picked arguments with her whenever she visited - meanwhile complaining that she never visited. This behaviour in turn had a serious effect on Melanie's self esteem. He continued to relate well to Ingar and David and saw them as "extremely well adjusted". He endeavoured to promote conflicts between Ingar and David on the one hand and Melanie on the other. Fortunately, the children stuck together and endeavoured to get the father to think about his suddenly irrational antagonism toward Melanie. It was he who finally recognised that Melanie

reminded him continually of the previous loving wife who had "inexplicably" left him.

CHILDREN'S PERCEPTIONS OF THEIR PARENTS' DIVORCE

Kurdek and Siesky (1980) have explored many aspects of children's perceptions of their parents' divorce. As in other matters there were differences according to developmental age, but to summarise, children generally describe the *negative* aspects of the divorce as not seeing much of the non-custodial parent and "feeling sad" and a greater appreciation of the parent's mood than is often realised. "Mum is sad", "Mum has a lot more to do". There is also an overall tendency for children to describe the non-custodial parent in more negative terms. *Positive* things were described as "Mum and Dad are not fighting any more", having fun times with the non-custodial parent, or that they felt closer to the custodial parent. In one study by Rosen, reported by Kurdek and Siesky (1980), of 9-28 year olds, many subjects conceived of themselves as having benefited from the divorce in terms of acquiring an understanding of human emotions and developing a sense of maturity and responsibility.

Children of divorce may also see their parents change behaviour-wise. Mothers, who were previously mostly cast in female stereotypes of warmth and as sources of love and gentleness, may gradually also adopt some masculine traits and become stricter and more assertive as they adapt to managing on their own. On the other hand, fathers may become more permissive and indulgent in order to hold the affection of their children. Also, divorced fathers may attempt to learn more about child development and thus increase their ability to empathise with their children.

Overall, most children believe that *after two years* the worst is over, and by four to six years after the divorce most children have undergone positive changes in their feelings about divorce and made good adjustments (Kurdek, Blisk & Siesky, in press). Contrary to much of the popular literature on divorce, the study by Kurdek and Siesky also suggests that ninety percent or more of children do not cling to the false hope of their parents' reconciliation.

CUSTODY

The Child's View

Lawyers and those interested in the rights of children are concerned that children are often not consulted in matters of their own custody. While improvement is urgently needed, there is a serious problem in "consulting" children about custody and taking what they say at face value. Many well-intentioned persons are so abysmally ignorant of child development that they do not understand that children, in the concrete and pre-logical stage of concept development, are unable to consider more than three or four variables at once. For such children, a recent kindness of an otherwise severely punitive parent may become perceptually dominant. They may falsely see themselves as deserving the unreasonable punitiveness of a particular parent for, as indicated earlier, younger children see themselves as described by persons who are significant to them (Phillips, 1979, Ch 5). They may also feel that they should be with the parent who has reversed roles with them, although this clearly places an undue burden upon them, as in the case of Donna:

Donna's parents separated when she was nine. The father adored the child and was reasonably straight-forward in his interaction with her. The mother was very insecure and continually accused the husband and Donna of not loving her. At the same time she discussed all her marital problems with Donna and demanded loving support from her, nevertheless abusing and insulting her and her father. The father took refuge frequently in the local hotel and Donna wondered why he did not protect her from her mother's abuse. She concluded the father did not love her and when the mother put pressure on the child to publicly assert she would prefer to be with her Donna did so. Donna's later adjustment was very poor and after she began to seriously deteriorate in her school performance a school counsellor was called in. During the subsequent sessions with the counsellor her misconception of her father's behaviour became apparent. Eventually she volunteered she'd prefer to go to boarding school and live during the holidays with a very affectionate grandmother. Although the father offered to pay the cost, this arrangement was rejected by the mother and five years later Donna is attending a psychiatrist.

However, although problems are experienced by children who succumb to adverse parental pressures, this does not mean children should not be consulted about custody. It means more care should be taken.

The Same Sexed Parent

The fashion of granting custody to mothers in western culture appears to date from the late nineteenth or early twentieth century. In the eighteenth century and earlier the father was almost inevitably given custody as paternity was more valued than maternity. Of late, the tendency for fathers to accept custody of their children is increasing.

The research on whether, after divorce, children are better with the same sexed parent has not always been well controlled. Research by Kulka and Weingarten (1979) suggests that children living with the opposite sexed parent (father custody girls and mother custody boys) are less well-adjusted than those living with the same sexed parent. Kurdek, Blisk and Siesky's research (in press) suggests that this is not the case, but the results are based on an upper-middle class sample.

There is also some suggestion that boys living with single divorced fathers have better self esteem, are warmer, less demanding, more mature, independent and sociable than boys in intact families (Santrock & Warshak, 1979). This probably says more about the lack of involvement of fathers in intact families and the good effects of their involvement than anything else. Indications are that many fathers who do have custody tend to accommodate their lives to their children, more than fathers in two parent families, and they tend to take more interest in child care facilities and education and become less disciplinarian than other fathers, as they become more familiar with the practical aspects of child development.

However, fathers vary enormously in their reactions and generally continue the relationship they had previously with their children, whether they have custody or not. Some persist and give careful thought to activities on access days, others are passive and bemoan their lot, others are perfunctory or continue to interact with the child because they are concerned what others may think (Dreyfus, 1979). These various reactions appear to effect the child's self esteem accordingly.

There seems little point in pursuing discussion of such factors as the effects of father absence on girls or boys in mother custody families, not only because this has been discussed in another Unit for Child Studies Paper (Phillips, 1980) but because what appears to be crucial is not so much the sex of the parent who has custody, as the style of parenting pursued (Santrock & Warshak, 1979). Authoritative parenting (Phillips, 1979, Ch 1) appears to ensure the best post divorce adjustment. This kind of parenting involves ensuring that children feel loved, accepted and respected, that rules are explained and consistently observed and that as mature behaviour as can be expected at that child's stage of development is encouraged. Permissive and authoritarian parenting (Phillips, 1979, Ch 1) seems fraught with problems in divorced families.

It should be noted that parenting in the first two years after divorce, even in the best of families, is often erratic (Phillips, 1980). Teachers and others who work with children often tend to over-generalise about these short term disruptions. Researchers, on the other hand, believe that the effect of divorce on the child needs to be observed in the longer term.

LONG TERM EFFECTS

Adjustment

Kulka and Weingarten (1979) in their research, suggest that contrary to much of the literature and popular thought, the early experiences of being a child of parents who have divorced, although painful, have, at most, a modest effect on adult adjustment. Much of the early research which found a higher rate of depression, delinquency, anti-social behaviour and psychiatric disturbance among those whose parents had divorced, was poorly controlled and confused the issue with the effects of poverty, past history of marital disturbance and failed to take account of the influences of sex, age, social class, marital history and other background factors.

Nevertheless, there is a greater tendency for those who are products of divorced families to identify childhood or adolescence as the most unhappy time of their lives. It also appears that coming from a home broken by parental divorce may provide a framing experience against which other experiences are consciously or unconsciously measured and consequently either pursued or avoided. The divorce certainly remains salient but the problem with some of the previous research is that it concentrated on spurious inter-relationships.

For example, although adults who are a product of divorced families are more likely to report that, at the time of the divorce or later, they felt that an impending breakdown on their part was likely, it is often overlooked that the parental decision to divorce or separate may provide children from non-intact homes with an opportunity or model for the public admission of problems. This group is also more likely to report that bad things have happened to them, but perhaps this is a realistic description of the effects of divorce and its aftermath.

Males

In their research, Kulka and Weingarten (1979) found that men, but not women, from divorced backgrounds are significantly more likely than their counterparts from intact backgrounds to report that they frequently "find things hard to

handle" when bad things happen to them. This again, as mentioned earlier, probably has something to do with the more limited emotional training offered to boys in our society, and hence, lesser resilience in such matters.

Parenting

The divorce of one's parents also seems to have some effect on later mothering and fathering roles. For example, women from non-intact families are significantly more likely than other women, to identify positive appraisals of their mothering as more important than their role as wives, while men from divorced parental backgrounds are less likely to mention negative changes to their lives when becoming parents than men from intact families.

Problem Solving

Hetherington, Cox and Cox (1978) suggest that unhappy conflicting families may have more negative effects on child development than voluntarily divorced family units that successfully avoid further prolonged conflict. This example of successful problem solving may be important in later relationships. Thus, although children of divorce are slightly more involved in divorce as adults than average, this may not necessarily reflect poor adjustment.

Thus, overall, it is clear that the transition period during and immediately following divorce is a stressful one. Much more research is needed as are support systems to assist family members in adjusting to stresses and changes associated with divorce. What can be done? An American programme for children facing divorce, developed by Kenneth Magid in Colorado, may offer some suggestions.

EDUCATIONAL PROGRAMME

The overall objectives of the Magid programme (1977) is to get children and parents to express their feelings and fears with regard to separation and divorce. Magid comments that when asked what was learned from the "children facing divorce" meetings, one ten-year-old said "I learned that its OK to say what you feel about divorce". A single parent said "I have learned that my daughters want me to listen to their feelings more often".

Children

As far as the children are concerned, Magid's aim is to get them to discuss guilt, anger and rejection in the light of reality and, also, within the parameters of their cognitive development as outlined earlier. He also aims to help them in thinking about reciprocal relationships and in understanding their parents' perspective. Some children need special help in identifying locked-in role patterns that don't fit the present - for example, fantasies that they'll get their parents together again. Magid also encourages more effective listening and communication skills between parents and children. When a person wants to communicate a thought but doesn't know how to express it to others, doesn't hear, and doesn't know how to listen, anxiety and frustration mount and hence, perhaps, aggression. Children's listening games are geared to encourage them to participate with and listen to, their peers rather than establish such

anti-social or aggressive means of communication.

Vignettes which portray scenes about children whose parents are divorcing help them to discuss locked-in feelings. For example, one vignette entitled "Who's to Blame" deals with the common fantasy that children are the guilty party. Another deals with "Mum's New Boyfriend" and the anger and resentment children often feel in such situations. The children also produce their own vignettes.

Parents

Parents, in the Magid programme, are also shown vignettes with the emphasis placed upon learning what their child may think, perceive or feel. Very often they know little about what their child really believes and feels.

Magid offers a list of dont's for parents:

* Don't use children as messengers between spouses
* Don't allow children to become small adults
* Don't isolate siblings
* Don't allow young children to become counsellors to your problems
* Don't promise children things and then not fulfill them
* Don't leave kids in the dark about the details of their future, such as custody arrangements
* Don't argue about financial matters in front of the kids with your former spouse
* Don't put down your ex-spouse in front of the kids
* Don't allow your own guilt to interfere with parental responsibility, neither be overprotective or underprotective
* Don't forget that your demonstrated love will conquer almost any obstacle between you and your child

Counsellors and Teachers

Magid's advice to counsellors and teachers is worth noting. He suggests they need to clarify their own values and feelings about divorce and avoid any suggestion to the child that he/she is now in an inferior or more wayward position. He particularly stresses the importance of teachers understanding the child's perspective and feelings throughout the divorce period. Other professionals could be added to the list, including judges and lawyers in the family law courts. In fact, much improvement is needed in educating the community as a whole on children, child development and children of divorce. The divorce rate is now such that at least one in three children is in some way affected by it.

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